

# THE VIRGINIA TEACHER

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## A CHANGE OF VIEWPOINT ON THE PART OF SCIENCE

SCIENCE in the nineteenth century preached the gospel of mammon. She recognized only one entity—the atom. This indivisible unit constituted reality. You are here to train your minds and lay a foundation for the development of your respective personalities. When I was an undergraduate, my schoolmates and I were not expected to have either minds or personalities. Then mind was an epiphenomenon. It was but the rattle of the machinery that the play of the atoms had constructed in their fortuitous dancing.

Even personality was but the outcome or by-product of atomic inter-relationships. It was but the outcome of the complex concatenation of circumstances that was behind it and the fortuitous concourse of atoms that was within it.

Little attention was given, therefore, to mind and personality by the science of the nineteenth century. Mind was not a factor in the growing universe and the purpose of personal effort was, in the last analysis, reduced to the determinism of a mechanical universe. "Love one another," to say nothing of "love your enemy," ran counter to the great law of natural selection in the struggle for existence wherein the strongest, best fighters survived. Religion had no place in a mechanical order. In a self-sufficient mechanism, as the universe was held to be, there could be no Creator.

All of this reminds us that Russia is the only nation that is now logically basing her efforts upon the scientific attitude of the nineteenth century.

This is a digest of the convocation address delivered by Professor Kepner at the State Teachers College on September 28, 1932.

But even England and America, to say nothing of other nations, are only too strongly impressed by the scientific teachings of the past century.

The rights of property are more strictly guarded than are the privileges of personality. This tendency of our civilization is seen abroad and at home. Five hundred English clergymen called the attention of Parliament to the fact that their pastoral experience gave them "direct knowledge of the sufferings and deprivations, mental, moral and physical, to which millions of our fellow citizens are subjected in our social and industrial order."

At home James M. Beck calls our attention to the false valuations that have arisen out of our mechanical civilization: "We overvalue knowledge; we undervalue wisdom. We overvalue pleasure; we undervalue work. We overvalue rights; we undervalue duty. We overvalue the State; we undervalue the citizen. We overvalue quantity; we undervalue quality. \* \* \* We overvalue physical power; we undervalue beauty. We overvalue matter; we undervalue spirit."

All of this suggests to me that we have been praying too earnestly "Give us this day our daily bread"; and forgetting to pray as earnestly that "Thy kingdom come."

For, upon all sides, we have food—so much food that the producer cannot sell it. Our prayer for daily bread has been answered. But the kingdom of love has not arrived; for millions in our own rich land go hungry this very day.

Science today gives some promise to help modify this sad situation.

Mechanism's foundation has been disturbed. Millikin indicated that mechanism has been thrown out of the house, root and branch.

At the close of the nineteenth century



some biologists were already not sanguine concerning the prevailing attitude of science. William Keith Brooks, for example, then remarked "Yes, my mind may be but the rattle of machinery; but what puzzles me is who or what hears the rattle?"

This represented a beginning. But more evidence of change is apparent today.

About 1900 a textbook of human physiology appeared under the title "The Human Machine." This year the professor of physiology at Harvard Medical School published a textbook of human physiology under the title: "The Wisdom of the Human Body."

Jennings calls attention to a monstrous absurdity of which the biologists have been guilty. This is that ideas, ideals, and purpose are not factors in organic evolution.

Wells, Huxley and Wells, in their "Outlines of Science," indicate that matter and mind are but two aspects of universal stuff. Hence mind or life becomes as real as silver, gold, flesh and blood.

The interesting suggestion arises out of my own study that the body is transient, whereas life persists.

I have seen, for example, twenty-five generations of a simple worm come and go, in my laboratory, and yet the purposiveness that is characteristic of life persists.

The physicist has never seen matter perish, though it may be transformed into energy.

I have never seen life perish. I have seen the medium through which life reveals itself broken and eventually decay.

The modern machine is a vehicle through which energy or electricity may be displayed. The destruction of the machine inhibits the demonstration of energy or electricity but does not result in the destruction of electricity.

So too the body of a living plant or animal is a vehicle through which life may be

displayed. The destruction of the body inhibits vital manifestation but it does not result in the destruction of life.

"Protoplasm as the physical basis of life" is no longer, therefore, an adequate definition. "Protoplasm is," rather, "the medium of vital manifestation."

Science in its altered attitude towards reality is lending support to the teachings of Christ who teaches his followers that they should seek Life and not the other aspect of universal stuff.

The time may not be far distant when men seek more diligently "to root out racial prejudices, economic injustices, class hatreds, slavery, and war, man's inhumanity to man, his mental sluggishness and moral inertia."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>"The Coming Religion." Nathaniel Schmidt. Macmillan Company, 1932.

WILLIAM ALLISON KEPNER

TO CARRY a full school program is more necessary in times of depression than in periods of prosperity . . . If it be found absolutely necessary to cut the state's expenditures, it would seem that some of the more material developments might well wait, but things that make for the spiritual, moral, and intellectual welfare of the state cannot wait, even in a period of economic depression.—*Virginia Journal of Education*.

THE ECONOMIC disaster that now confronts the American people should not be permitted to visit its effect on the next generation . . . Time lost in providing an adequate program of education for the child can never be made up, either by the school system or by the child . . .—*Willard E. Givens, California, in Sierra Educational News*.

THAT the essentials of our educational system should be preserved, the economy drives should acknowledge. And the greatest of the essentials is competent teaching personnel.—*Des Moines Register-Tribune*.